

3. To realise the Atma, overcome four obstacles

To realise this *Atma*, this embodiment of spiritual wisdom (*jnana-swarupa*), four obstacles have to be overcome: sleep (*laya*), waywardness (*vikshepa*), inertia (*kshaya*), and the enjoyment of bliss (*rasa-aswadana*). Let's analyze them one by one.

Sleep (*laya*). When the mind withdraws from the external world, it enters into deep sleep (*sushupti*), because of the overpowering influence of the objective world (*samsara*). The spiritual aspirant should arrest this tendency and attempt to fix the mind on the inquiry into the nature of the true Self (*Atma-vichara*). The aspirant must keep watch over the mind in order to keep awake and must discover the circumstances that induce the drowsiness and remove them in time. The aspirant must start the process of meditation (*dhyana*) again and again.

Of course, the usual producer of drowsiness and sleep during meditation is indigestion. Overfeeding, exhaustion through too much moving about, want of sufficient sleep at night —these also cause sleepiness and drowsiness. So on those days when you wake up after a sleepless night, it is advisable to sleep a little at noon, although generally all those who engage in meditation should avoid sleep during the daytime.

Don't eat until you feel proper hunger. Practise the art of moderate eating. When you feel three-fourths full, stop eating; that is to say, stop even when you feel you can take a little more. In this way, the stomach can be educated to behave properly.

Over-exercise is also not good. Even walking can be overdone. You can walk until you conquer drowsiness, but remember that you cannot plunge into meditation immediately after you have warded off sleep.

Waywardness (*vikshepa*). The mind seeks to run after external objects, so constant effort is needed to turn it inward, away from the attractions of sensory impressions. This has to be done through the rigorous exercise of the intellect, of inquiry. Discriminate and get the conviction driven into you that these sensory impressions are evanescent, temporary, transformable, liable to decay, and, therefore, unreal (*mithya*) and not truth (*sathya*). Convince yourself that what is sought after as pleasurable and avoided as painful are only the fleeting products of sensory contacts. Train yourself in this way to avoid the distractions of the external world and dive deep into meditation.

A sparrow pursued by a hawk flies in despair for shelter into a house, but it is anxious to fly again into the outer world, right? So also, the mind is anxious to go again into the outer world, from the *Atma*, where it takes refuge. Waywardness is this mental attitude, this urge to run back into the world from one's shelter. Only the removal of waywardness will help the concentration of the mind in meditation (*dhyana*).

Inertia (*kshaya*). The mind is drawn with immense force by all the unconscious and subconscious impulses and instincts of passion and attachment toward the external world and its multitudinous attractions. Therefore, it experiences untold misery and might even get lost in its depths. This stage is called "decline of faculties due to inertia".

The state of inertia into which one is driven by despair cannot be called perfect equanimity (*samadhi*). One might even indulge in daydreaming in order to escape from present misery or start building castles in the air. All this is due to attachment, to the temptations of the outer world.

There is another type of attachment, the attachment to the inner world, the planning within oneself of various schemes to better oneself in the future as compared to the past. Both these form part of what is called decline (*kshaya*). The basis for both is the attraction of the outer world. Attachment brings about desire, and desire leads

to planning.

Enjoyment of bliss (*rasa-aswadana*). When inertia and waywardness are overcome, one attains the bliss of the highest subject-object contact (*sa-vikalpa-ananda*). This stage is called the enjoyment of bliss.

Even this is not the Supreme Bliss, which one does not attain or acquire but simply becomes aware of, so to say. The sweetness (*rasa*) of the differentiating superconscious state is a temptation that one has to avoid, for it is only second best. It is enough joy to act as a handicap. The joy is as great as that of people who just deposited a huge load they had carried for a long time, or that of greedy people who just killed a serpent guarding a vast treasure they wanted to grab. Is the mind content with merely killing the serpent guarding the treasure? No. This is only the preliminary step of overcoming waywardness. True bliss is not experienced until the treasure is actually possessed. Likewise, one must not stop with mere subject-object type of superconscious state (*sa-vikalpa-samadhi*). From such a limited state, one must reach the highest superconscious state (*nir-vikalpa-samadhi*), where there is no mind or any ideation.